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## 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference, Africa: 53 Countries, One Union—

### The New Challenges

The Ronald Reagan Building  
and International Trade Center  
Washington, D.C.

Excerpt of Keynote Address by Rep. Chris Smith  
June 15, 2011

During the UN Millennium Development Goals Summit in New York last September, I had the privilege of participating in an extraordinary Roundtable meeting of African First Ladies that concluded with the signing of a declaration to end maternal and child malnutrition with particular emphasis on “the first 1000 days in the life of a child from the moment of conception.”

I mention this in part because an eloquent keynote address was given that day by First Lady Callista Mutharika of Malawi, wife of tonight’s keynoter, President Bingu wa Mutharika.

The Roundtable concluded that under nutrition remains “one of the world’s most serious, but least addressed problems—killing an estimated 3.5 million children annually. Moreover, 60 percent of the world’s chronically hungry are women.

And according to the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), cosponsor of the Roundtable, malnutrition’s most devastating impact is actually in the womb, often causing death or significant mental and physical disability to the precious life of an unborn child. Today the U.S. is partnering with Ireland to enhance food security so that during those critical first 1,000 days of life, more little girls and boys will have a greater chance at a longer and healthier future.

The tangible benefits of President Bush's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR) is well documented and has been—and must continue to be—transformational: new HIV infections have declined from 16,000 per day in 2001 to 7,000 HIV infections per day in 2009.

Approximately 400,000 infant HIV infections have been averted and ARVs have been provided to over 3.2 million people.

Numerous other health initiatives including efforts to combat malaria, TB, tropical illness, and diarrheal disease have had a stunning impact. Powerful but inexpensive interventions include childhood vaccinations and oral rehydration therapy (ORT) have saved a generation and need not only to be sustained—but expanded.

Best practices to radically reduce maternal mortality can and must be life-affirming—protecting from harm both patients, the mother and the child in the womb.

Of course, we have known for more than 60 years what actually saves women's lives: skilled birth attendants, treatment to stop hemorrhages, access to safe blood, emergency obstetric care, antibiotics, repair of fistulas, adequate nutrition, and pre-and post-natal care.

Political will is absolutely essential to bring scrutiny and light—and hopefully some answers—to challenges facing Africa. I, for one, believe that elected representatives have an awesome responsibility to use their positions to help “the least of these.”

As chairman of the Africa, Global Health and Human Rights subcommittee in the House of Representatives I have sought to bring attention to issues that normally see very little light of day, let alone print on websites or sound bites on news broadcasts.

Here are a few examples: on May 31<sup>st</sup> I chaired a hearing on Global Autism, a developmental disability “pandemic” mal-affecting a staggering 67 million people worldwide including, according to the a WHO official “tens of millions in Africa” who have autism.

On a visit to Lagos, Nigeria in 2007, I learned from a leader of a small autism NGO there that the number of autistic children in Africa are increasing yet are largely “invisible.”

Brigitte Kobenan, formerly of Cote d'Ivoire, now a U.S. citizen, and founder of Autism Community in Africa, testified at the hearing that unlike her autistic son Vinny, the,

“...children of Africa are not as lucky. There are no infrastructures to help them. Doctors don't have the equipment necessary to diagnose the problem and there is no follow up programs. As of now, a few NGOs in countries like Nigeria, Cameroun, South Africa and Ghana are struggling to take on the challenge. These NGOs were created mostly by parents who were frustrated by lack of infrastructures to help their children. But they are faced with a variety of challenges: lack of funds, lack of support from the government, fear from families to show their “evil” child with autism etc....This is a reality on the field. These kids are hidden.”

This past Monday, I chaired another hearing on human sex and labor trafficking—modern day slavery with a focus on best practice and next steps including slavery in the DR Congo mining zones.

A decade ago I authored the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, the landmark law that established the TIP office and Ambassador at Large at State, a bold strategy that included sheltering, asylum, and other protections for victims, long jail sentences and asset confiscation for the traffickers and tough sanctions for governments that fail to meet minimum standards prescribed in the TVPA. The annual trafficking in persons report, required by the Act, is due out this month.

Yet it is clear we must do more and encourage government and the private sector to get involved—particularly in Africa.

Our witnesses from the hotel industry and airlines told us on Monday how they systematically trained their employees to recognize potential trafficking victim as well as the abuser and how to safely convey that actionable information in a timely manner to law enforcement.

In July, my subcommittee will focus on the oft neglected children with hydrocephalus in Africa—with African neurosurgeons from CURE Children's Hospital of Uganda explaining how they have successfully treated 4,000 hydrocephalic children using a breakthrough procedure developed by Dr. Benjamin Warf of Harvard Medical School who will also testify.

At two previous hearings that I chaired, Jane Holl Lute—Under Secretary Susana Malcorra's predecessor at the UN—testified on rape and exploitation by UN Peacekeepers deployed to DR Congo and efforts the UN was making to enforce its zero tolerance policy. That said, U.S. support of UN Peacekeeping missions has been consistently strong underscored by our \$1.6 billion in FY 2010 the majority going to Darfur and DR Congo, plus off budget costs like airlift.

Tomorrow at 2:00 PM, I will chair a hearing on Sudan and the crisis in Abyei, featuring Special Envoy Princeton Lyman.

In the coming weeks and months we will focus on boosting trade and economic development with particular emphasis on the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) which offers 6400 items that African companies can export to the U.S. duty free and quota free. Just last week the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual AGOA conference in Zambia brought together 37 eligible African countries for talks. Africa is an emerging economic powerhouse. Africa's success will be the world's success—a rising tide raises all the boats.

In 1998, I chaired the hearings on the terror bombing on the U.S. Embassy in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi.

Today the transnational war on terror is virtually everywhere—and a persistent threat to life and the economic vitality throughout the African continent.

For the past 31 years as a Member of Congress—especially as Chairman for 10 years of the global human rights committee—I’ve dedicated most of my time on the promotion of human rights, humanitarian and health causes and respect for the rule of just law.

From that experience, I am more committed to democracy than ever.

While democracies, as we all know, are far from perfect, often riddled with injustice, inefficiency, ineptness and seeming irrelevance, they remain the best option, by far, of all other alternatives. In a democracy, writing good law and crafting prudent policy that truly benefit the people seems always to be an arduous process—but always well worth the struggle.

Violence free, benign, adversarial competition among candidates and political parties is a good thing—never to be shunned—and more likely to ensure that all are enfranchised and share the blessings of democracy regardless of race, religion, color, sex, age, disability or condition of dependency.

Absent the basic institutions of government—legislative, executive, and independent judiciary and a free and unfettered press—efforts to safeguard human rights especially for the weakest and most vulnerable, are undermined.

And full participation of a robust civil society that includes faith based organizations and ever expanding educational opportunities will assuredly result in more just, humane and prosperous nations in Africa.

I wish you every success at this important conference.